Gouvernement du Québec
Comité Catholique

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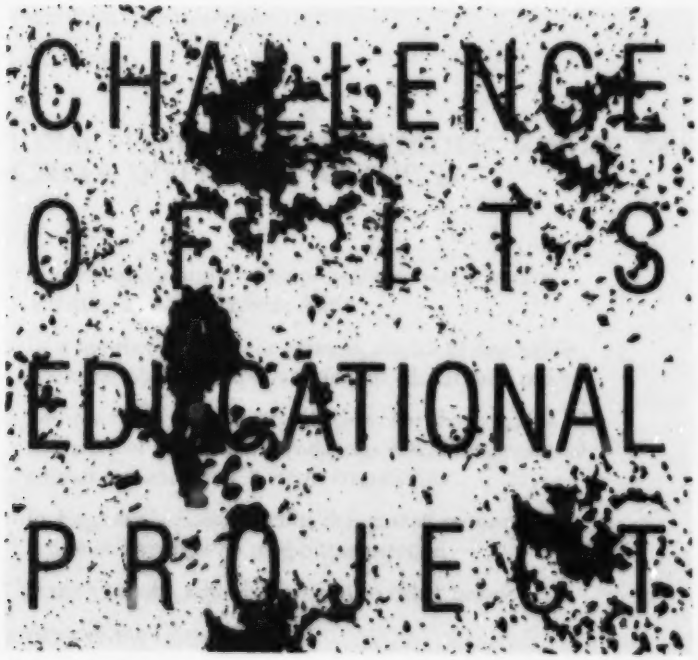
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

CHALLENGE OF ITS EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Québec

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL:



90-05426/

ISBN: 2-550-15190-9
Legal deposit: first quarter 1990
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE **THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT FOR THE QUÉBEC SCHOOL: DECISIVE FACTORS**	3
1.1 Participation in the life of the school	3
1.1.1 Participation of students	3
1.1.2 Participation of teachers	4
1.1.3 Participation of professional staff	5
1.1.4 Participation of the administration	5
1.1.5 Participation of parents	5
1.2 The school's relationship with goals and values	6
1.2.1 Relationships more theoretical than practical	6
1.2.2 General preoccupations with certain values	6
1.2.3 Influence of values on practices: limited but definite	7
1.2.4 Obstacles to goals and educational values	8
1.3 Major organizational structures	9
1.4 Today's challenges	10
CHAPTER TWO **THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL IN QUÉBEC: VARIOUS PRACTICES, DIVERSE CONCEPTIONS**	13
2.1 Present practices	13
2.1.1 Schools make implicit connections between certain activities and the Catholic faith	13
2.1.2 In a number of Catholic schools, choice of one value takes the place of implementing an educational project	13
2.1.3 Some schools entrust responsibility for the religious character of the school to religious education, pastoral animation, and the Christian community	14
2.1.4 In English Catholic schools, the general atmosphere is one of openness to religious expression	17
2.1.5 Some Catholic schools are open to other beliefs	17
2.2 Various views of the Catholic school	18
2.2.1 Catholic schools in the socioreligious context	18

2.2.2 Three "idealistic" views of the Catholic school 19

2.2.3 Three "realistic" views of the Catholic school 19

CHAPTER THREE
BEYOND AMBIGUITY 21

3.1 A new situation 21

3.2 Four characteristics of the identity of the Catholic school 22

3.2.1 First characteristic: a bias for education 23

3.2.2 Second characteristic: the significant contribution of Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation to the religious, moral and social formation of young people 24

3.2.3 Third characteristic: the human growth of the student and of the educational milieu 25

3.2.4 Fourth characteristic: its Catholic character 26

3.3 Profile of the Catholic school 27

CHAPTER FOUR
THE POSSIBILITIES OF REALITY 29

4.1 The educational project or the challenge to the school to refocus itself 29

4.1.1 A decision, trust and a conviction 29

4.1.2 A clear idea of the school's mission 29

4.1.3 Objectives within a changing school 30

4.2 The educational project and integration of beliefs and values of the Catholic religion 30

4.2.1 Reference to beliefs and values 30

4.2.2 Integrating the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into the educational project 33

4.3 Respect for freedom of conscience and of religion 34

4.4 Evaluation of the school's functioning as a confessional institution 35

CONCLUSION 37

A public school recognized as Catholic shall integrate the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into its educational project, while maintaining respect for freedom of conscience and of religion.

(Section 4 of the Regulation of the Catholic Committee)

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Committee has decided to focus its 1988-1989 report on the educational project of the Catholic school. Since the adoption, in December 1987, of the new regulation on the Catholic character of the schools,[1] various interested groups of persons in the elementary and secondary schools have urged the Committee to enlarge upon the meaning of article 4 of its Regulation: a Catholic school integrates the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into its educational project, while maintaining respect for freedom of conscience and of religion. Such questioning touches the educational project as well as the values of the Catholic religion. This questioning manifests doubts regarding both respect for freedom of conscience and for religion in the Catholic school.

The Committee therefore decided to undertake a systematic study of these questionings within the context of the daily operation of the school. The Committee wanted to understand the basis of satisfaction, doubts, hesitation, uncertainty or intolerance concerning the Catholic school. The Committee sought to identify, at the level of the school itself, existing practices and understandings, ambiguities and stumbling blocks with regard to the preparation of the educational project as it refers explicitly to the Catholic faith.

The field surveyed was vast. The Committee visited a great many schools designated by 40 different school board administrations. At least 80 elementary and secondary schools of every size and environment were visited. Within each, the president of the Committee or a research assistant met with the administration and eight members of the teaching staff other than teachers of secondary Catholic religious and moral instruction. The purpose of this research was to pinpoint the beliefs and values which actually have a polarizing effect in the schools. Individual and collective practices likely to be consistent with an educational project that is Christian in inspiration were discussed with the staff. In effect, the ***content*** of the educational project (article 4 of the Regulation) were the focus of the discussion.

In addition, over the past two years the members of the Catholic Committee have visited and held hearings in four school boards. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss ***procedures*** for drawing up and implementing the educational project. Who was to do it and how? When was it to be done and with whom? What were the advantages and drawbacks? During the hearings, the Committee also met with staff of English Catholic schools who have practices and expectations often different from those of the French Catholic schools. The Committee also sought to know from the students themselves what they felt about their participation in their moral and religious training. Some Committee members met with pastoral animators from four Québec dioceses as well as teachers of moral and religious instruction at the annual meeting of their professional association. Finally, the Committee carried out a survey among Christian education counsellors of all school commissions to verify certain of their perceptions of the educational project for Catholic schools.

This report, therefore, presents the situation and the needs of the Catholic school. It sketches a portrait of the reality as presented to the Committee in order to draw up a profile of the Catholic school today.

There are four chapters. The first presents the testimony heard on certain factors that play a role in bringing about the educational project: participation in the life of the school, commitment to values, structural constraints, and challenges. It describes the basic realities of the Catholic school, its opportunities and difficulties.

The second chapter deals with the various practices concerning the educational project and the different conceptions of the Catholic school, again through testimony from the milieux consulted. It also describes the ambiguities and the questions raised by these practices and conceptions.

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1. Catholic Committee, Regulation respecting the recognition of elementary and secondary schools of the public school system as Catholic and their confessional character, Québec, 1988.

   Catholic Committee, Regulation respecting the recognition of private, elementary and secondary educational institutions as Catholic and their confessional character, Québec, 1988.

Chapter Three attempts to remove certain ambiguities and to define certain concepts more clearly, in order to outline the essential components of the Catholic school of today.

The fourth chapter offers an interpretation of article 4 of the Regulation. This interpretation is founded on a view of the educational mission of the Catholic school, as well as on a proposal for the educational project as an instrument of change. In the Catholic school, the dynamic of change will take place within the influence of the beliefs and values of the Catholic faith.

CHAPTER ONE

THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT FOR THE QUÉBEC SCHOOL: DECISIVE FACTORS

The recent hearings of the Catholic Committee in four school boards, and the many meetings it held in the fall of 1988 with 80 school represented confirm an initial hypothesis: the achievements and the difficulties of the Catholic school are, in part, the achievements and the difficulties of Québec schools. The Catholic school is a school. It cannot deny what it is, rather the contrary. Its constituent elements determine the realization of its educational project.

In fact, based on the findings of the Committee, the realization of the educational project for the Catholic school will inevitably be influenced by a number of factors common to all schools. Visits to the selected schools identified four factors considered among the most important: participation in the life of the school, the school's position on goals and values, constraints due to organizational structures and today's challenges facing Québec education.

This first chapter reports the testimony heard concerning those factors which influence the realization of the educational project. It also spells out those elements to be retained in reflecting on article 4 of the Regulation.

1.1 Participation in the life of the school

It does not take much discussion with school representatives to understand that a school is first and foremost determined by those who make up the school. Whether it is a question of expectations and practices with regard to the educational project or of the conditions conducive to its realization, the comments gathered by the Committee referred in turn to the students, the teaching staff, the professional personnel, the administration and the parents. Their involvement in the life of the school seems to be a decisive factor in the preparation of the project. The paragraphs that follow briefly indicate how those who make up the school see themselves and their participation in school life. Indicated as well is how the school perceives their participation.

1.1.1 Participation of students

Generally, the school administration has the most to say about student participation in the life of the school, the number and diversity of groups as well as availability and range of services offered. In general, it rates the participation of secondary students in free activities to be relatively low. The administration notes that the interest, motivation and perseverance of these young people had to be constantly stimulated both as regards their studies and extracurricular activities. In the elementary school the situation described is different. There are fewer activities offered to the whole school. They consist mainly of celebrations and are said to be generally much appreciated. It is the teachers who motivate the children whatever the activity.

Teachers in the second cycle of elementary school and in the secondary school speak of a lack of interest of many students in school itself. They are agreed that the young people experience intensely today's impact of the evolving family, society, culture and economy. For example, in one secondary school with 1200 students in the second cycle, 40 percent of the students were experiencing difficulties, 20 percent of them with problems so great that adults in similar circumstances would not know how to resolve them. In the depressed areas of large urban centres, we are told, more than 35 percent of families live below the poverty threshold. More than ever students, especially those living in depressed areas, are suffering shock as a result of the evolution of values, intellectual and cultural disparities, failure at school, loss of self-esteem, isolation and instability. Another, new phenomenon was also mentioned, one which has the effect of decreasing still more the involvement of students in the fourth and fifth

years of secondary school: many students have paying jobs after school and on weekends. As well, according to the testimony we heard, many students are at school without being part of the school.

Three types of comments were made by the secondary students who met with the Committee. The leaders did not feel they played any part in administrative decisions affecting them. The way in which the student council is set up seems not to satisfy them. They would prefer concrete short-term commitments in specific projects to which they are prepared to dedicate themselves: the graduation ball, a fashion show, an awards evening, a fund-raising event, a third-world project, a weekend of reflection, and so on. According to these same students the life and organization of the school subject them to numerous constraints and leave them with little breathing space. Some of the examples they gave are: the short time for change between activities, the difficulty of the subject matter of some disciplines, the frequency of tests, and the arrival and departure of buses at set times. Thus their participation in the life of the school is necessarily limited.

On the other hand, some students said they felt they belonged to the school because of the opportunities for social life in small groups or because they had a motivating relationship with an adult in the school.

Finally, all those whom the Committee met felt it was normal that courses required a minimum of personal participation by the students if they hoped to succeed in their secondary studies; but certain subjects, such as mathematics, science and language were more important and required more effort.

1.1.2 Participation of teachers

The teachers said they had recovered somewhat from the difficult decree of 1982, and once again felt a certain professional motivation and legitimate pride. They felt that their most important role was teaching, and they tried to do the job to the best of their ability.

Teachers in the elementary school appreciated having their own classes, their own children. Their daily contacts with the pupils, who are still young and who, in many cases, have difficult family situations, strengthen the affective ties. At the secondary level, the teachers claimed they had to put up with the rigidity and fragmentation of the school organization and, consequently, had difficulty in establishing human relations other than functional ones with their students, colleagues, the parents and the administration. They felt as well that extracurricular activities, supervisory duties and measures of pedagogical support were frequently privileged opportunities to make contact with the students.

Three other factors had the effect of reducing or slowing down participation by the teaching staff in the general life of the school. The teachers singled out first the introduction of new programs of study. Because of the many hours of personal study required, they make the teaching load heavier and reduce teacher availability, at least temporarily. This is particularly true for elementary teachers who must teach several programs. It is the case also for substitute staff or secondary teachers who teach more than one discipline.

The integration within the school of diverse student groups with different needs is considered to be another demand of the system. The justification for this is not questioned, for the school is there for everyone. The teachers accept without question the concept of general accessibility to the public school. However, this situation has an effect on teaching methods, which must be constantly adapted to the diverse needs of the students and their progress. The time given to promote the life of the school is often devoted to preparing diverse learning activities.

Finally, teachers say that age has definite effects on one's involvement in the life of the school, particularly when it is a question of extracurricular activities, and they see the presence of active young colleagues as a factor of renewal.

1.1.3 Participation of professional staff

It is generally felt that the role of professionals in the school is becoming increasingly important. Speech therapists, remedial teachers, psychoeducators, pastoral workers, psychologists, guidance counsellors, nurses and social workers are specialists whom the school claims it can no longer do without and who, according to the teachers, are not sufficient in number. The professional describes the contribution to the school's educational mission as one of personal assistance to students in difficulty. Some schools have designed, in collaboration with their professional staff, effective ways of spotting students that are in difficulty and of acting quickly in moments of crisis. Thanks to the efforts of professional staff, with the essential support of the administration and some of the teachers, the students at one of the secondary schools visited have become skilled in listening to their fellow students and in detecting suicidal tendencies and drug addiction.

1.1.4 Participation of the administration

School principals, when asked about their personal participation in school life, stressed leadership, and had three comments to make.

First, generally speaking school administrations felt themselves torn between their pedagogical role and their administrative role and gave many examples of this dilemma. However, they recognized that their pedagogical role was becoming increasingly important. Some of the measures they had recently instituted were indicative of new concerns in their management roles: pedagogical supervision, support for formative evaluation of learning, setting up measures of pedagogical support etc.

Concerning the specific question of developing the educational project, administrators recognized their responsibilities and their limitations. According to them, the present school situation, determined by such structures as regulations governing the pedagogical system, collective agreements and school budget, is not conducive to leadership in the school's major objectives, nor to their task in bringing about a basic consensus among the various partners of the school community.

The third comment concerned the orientation committee. Many school administrators know that the new Education Act entrusts to the orientation committee of the school the task of determining the policy governing the educational project. The administration is entrusted with the responsibility of adopting measures to ensure that this policy will be implemented and evaluated. But they have questions. Will this new legal directive be able to contribute to the planned management of the school in its basic and essential function? Will the involvement of the various agents in the life of the school be improved?

1.1.5 Participation of parents

The Catholic Committee heard the testimony of several parents on this question. It first notes their comments. It then considers the viewpoints of other parties interested in the life of the school.

The parents say that the numbers of parents wishing to take part in the activities of the school committee and in parents' meetings are few. The greatest numbers come when it is time to meet with teachers individually, when school resumes in the fall and when reports are given out. They claim they wish to know the teachers and increasingly they rely on them not only for the instruction of their children but also for education in general. The parents' participation in the life of the school diminishes as the child grows up. In the secondary school, however, a larger number of parents of first year students who are upset by their new experience is generally to be found visiting the school. The parents met by the Committee state their expectations of the school: to offer good quality educational services, to motivate the student to make an effort, to inculcate a taste for studies, to maintain good discipline, to meet explicit requirements, to attend to each child whatever his talents, to offer a reasonable chance of success. As to the religious aspect, the parents state their preference for a Catholic school and for religious instruction, and they rely on the school for religious formation.

The school teams noted that Québec families are acquiring new behaviour patterns which change the relations they have traditionally maintained with the school. Their present behaviour does not always favour collaboration with the school in the best interests of the child. The Committee heard a few examples. Children are left more to their own devices in doing their homework; they stay up later; weekends are often upsetting from the affective viewpoint; meals are not always well-balanced; studying at home takes place dominated by noise and a barrage of rapidly changing images; information acquired is extensive, disparate and often contradictory. A new cultural profile is being drawn with which the schools say they are not familiar. Such is also the case for many allophone families. Nine schools in the Montréal region were visited by the Catholic Committee. Because of the great number of ethnic groups represented, the school population of six of these was over 60 percent allophone, and two of them totalled over 90 percent. These groups were mainly Hispanic, Haitian, Asian, African and Italian. These new Quebecers know neither the language of the school, its customs nor its rules for daily life. In brief, the participation of families in school life is always preferable but is becoming more and more difficult.

The Committee selected some of the main ideas in the testimony heard about participation in the life of the school for further reflection on the educational project. Students, teaching staff, professional staff, the administration and parents are all important components of the school. Their expectations with regard to the school do not seem automatically to coincide, nor does their participation in the educational project appear to be certain. But the participation of each of these components is important for the realization of the project, in which concerted action is an essential requirement.

1.2 The school's relationship with goals and values

In 1979, at the time of the publication of ***The Schools of Québec***,[2] Québec educational circles were very receptive of the goal proposed to them, i.e. the integrative education of the student. This educational vision of a wish largely shared, henceforth recognized, that the school undertake an open educational task: an intellectual education certainly, but the development as well of all the aptitudes and potentialities of the student. This first objective was regarded as a general theme, capable of inspiring specific educational projects. What is the situation today? Are the schools finding inspiration in it for their own educational projects?

1.2.1 Relationships more theoretical than practical

The many contacts the Committee has had recently with the schools show that the 1979 survey has had results. The expressions "integrative education" and "education in values" are no longer strangers to the schools. These terms are familiar to the staff, but not to the parents; this was clear when, in their interviews with the Committee, these ideas came up. And these same expressions are used in the few educational projects that are actually on paper. But the schools admit that these remain theoretical. They have not succeeded in creating truly unified projects, except in some school directives, or in some partial aspect of school life, e.g. school rules. Briefly, according to the persons the Committee met, educational goals and values can hardly be said to inspire new life into the school.

1.2.2 General preoccupations with certain values

Focus on the student

The education system, with a view to accessibility, equality of opportunity and public education, as well as the comprehensive development of every student, has advocated and realized the integration of young people with adjustment and learning difficulties. As well, it advocated development of services adapted to various academic paths. Similar institutional provisions were adopted in some localities to welcome and integrate allophone students.

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2. Ministère de l'Éducation, ***The Schools of Québec: Policy Statement and Plan of Action***, Québec, 1979.

The schools the Committee visited are daily required to see to the education of students at different rates of learning, many with specific needs, many from a variety of cultural backgrounds. These facts must be dealt with; they are of great importance. However, in the opinion of the school teams which the Committee met, these are concerns of an educational nature. The schools dare not yet speak of concerted action with regard to these realities, but certainly they can speak of these more generalized collective concerns. They talk of the need TO BE MORE ATTENTIVE TO THE STUDENT.

Training in personal responsibility

The testimony heard in the school forms part of a major movement of social pressure to obtain high quality academic services that are conducive to the success of the students. It is a demand for a systematic, basic subject matter approach and a strict education with emphasis on methodical work and intellectual effort.

At the secondary school in particular, it was maintained that more and more attention was being paid to those values termed intellectual by ***the Schools of Québec***[3]. Some schools set uniform standards for a school, but most often these were day to day policies established by some departments or teams for the year: use of exercise books, note-taking, assignments handed in on time, class discipline, measures of support, absenteeism, communication with the home. Such practices were intended to counteract a certain laxness by providing TRAINING IN PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. In the words most commonly heard in the schools, it was a matter of training the student to be responsible.

Respect

Almost all the schools, presenting a written text, elaborate an educational project on the basis of consensus. These valorize respect from which various requirements arise for action and behaviour: self-respect, respect for others, respect for the environment, respect for rules, respect for human rights, respect for beliefs, respect for different opinions and so on. On the basis of a fairly easily attained consensus, the schools that stress RESPECT may fix minimal conditions for "living together" that favour both personal development and harmonious relations. This is true, for example, of one comprehensive school with 2000 students. There respect, widely encouraged as a general precept, has gradually replaced the atmosphere of violence and intolerance that hitherto existed. The school valorizes for each of its members the right to develop one's own identity, needs, interests, talents and abilities. Everything within the school is centred upon the individual and as well demands an attitude of responsibility towards the other, who also has rights. Such infatuation with respect is not unrelated, so the schools think, with a certain encompassing individualism and with a certain societal priority accorded to individual rights. On the other hand, and paradoxically, the will to mutual respect sometimes even prevents a real exchange of ideas. The schools claim that even a minimal consensus results in a decrease in the discussion and exchange required to fix the basic goals of the school.

1.2.3 Influence of values on practices: limited but definite

Influences on individuals and work groups

The persons interviewed spoke to the Committee about the great number of practices and activities inspired by one or the other value. Few among them, however, acknowledged common convictions or priorities resulting from collaboration. The influence of goals and values are apparent in certain individual or group initiatives. Such a value or goal may characterize the profile of this or that teacher, this department or that team. This influences their manner of behaving with students, the enforcement of discipline, interest in the families of students, the attention paid to the gifted and to the less able, participation in extracurricular activities, etc.

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3. *Ibid.* No. 2.2.

Influences that favour the student

All school practices based on one or another value show a desire to be concerned with the student. At the elementary level, teachers consider it normal to pay attention to the personal problems of the pupils; they will seat a slow learner close to them, praise each student in turn, check the contents of lunch boxes, encourage the pupils to tell about their weekend, organize celebrations, make a family of their class. In the secondary school, teachers use the tutorial system, organize meetings by class to monitor progress, refer students in difficulty to professionals, eat in the cafeteria with the more disadvantaged students, make contact with families and so on. But such attention would seem to be fairly uncommon. Many students do not have the personal services they need. The heavy teaching load and the large number of students per class would explain the problem in part.

Effects on teaching methods

From the discussion on the implications of educational goals and values, what happens in class, at the level of pedagogy, is of the greatest importance.

Integrative education, concern for the student, training toward responsibility and independence, education in solidarity and openness to the school community have for the past 10 years resulted in various pedagogical initiatives. In the elementary school particularly, teachers say they have begun to vary learning situations, and encourage workshops, work in groups, exchanges, discussion, outings, etc. These practices are still current, but a certain suspicion has arisen in their regard, bolstered by society's misgivings about the effectiveness of the school.

In the secondary school, integrative education has often resulted in the varying of learning situations and even in going beyond the subject matter on occasion. New study programs would seem to limit this type of creative teaching or reduce these digressions. The great number of objectives and the compulsory content they imply mean a type of teaching centred more on the material to be transmitted than on the students. Active teaching methods exist still, but it would seem that they are fewer and conducted with less conviction.

1.2.4 Obstacles to goals and educational values

Fragmented education, an impediment to integrative education

The teaching at the elementary school appears to be more favourable to integrative education. This is not true for the secondary school, where the organization tends to fragment educational activities. Nevertheless, the secondary school enjoys a modest satisfaction with regard to the goal by offering a diversity of programs and, in some instances, a variety of extracurricular activities. Each discipline is supposed to contribute to the development of one aspect of the person. The spiritual, moral and religious aspects are entrusted to teacher of Catholic moral and religious instruction, to the teacher of moral education, and the pastoral animator, and the training of the body, to the teacher in physical education.

In answering the questions of the Catholic Committee, the school representatives admitted that integration of education is presumed. The timetable, in the final analysis, assures integration of education. They also admit that this is rarely the concern of each teacher. A teacher tries to present material competently and counts on other teachers to do likewise, each one making a contribution to the whole.

The fragmentation and compartmentalization of educational activities in the secondary school appear to impede integrative education, which is described as the responsibility of all parties in the school.

A sterile, overly ideological conception of the educational project

A great many schools speak of the educational project as a trite, burned-out idea, saying it is one of the many innovations, today outmoded, that the education world has known over the past decade.

Often associated with this idea is the memory of collective efforts, in which the parents took part, that were repeated every year in the search for a value that would define the school's educational project. This value was often related to the confessional status of the school. The idea of an educational project has sometimes had ideological or even confessional connotations that have stripped it of its pedagogical meaning. The schools feel that educational projects have not succeeded in going beyond the discussion of principles; or, when they have resulted in something concrete, it is usually in the form of an ethical watchword designed to improve this or that kind of behaviour or the observance of some point of discipline. They are seen as having developed on the margin of pedagogical programs properly speaking, that is those objectives which are essentially concerned with academic progress and deal with student motivation, course content, evaluation, success, failure and so forth. After 10 years the idea of the educational project no longer attracts. There are many reasons for this, beginning with the real difficulty of establishing a consensus. But it must be admitted—and the schools are the first to agree—that educational projects seem too remote from the concerns and real challenges of the school.

Loss of a sense of responsibility

As we shall see farther on, and as was reiterated, the major organizing structures of the school have a demobilizing effect. The school organization, collective agreements, and budgetary and administrative rules help explain the lack of will to institute an educational project. Determination is indispensable if a school is really going to be self governing and if all concerned are to commit themselves to the academic success of the students.

Weakness in leadership regarding policy and consensus

The school administrators that the Committee met said they were aware of the effects of academic constraints on their leadership. They know the difficulties involved in mobilizing all educational agents around the same goal or to put a plan of action into operation. They cite by way of example the particularly difficult task of reconciling the expectations of parents and those of school personnel with regard to the educational project. There is often a wide gap between the two groups, which makes consensus a problem.

> **From all the testimony heard on the subject of the school with its goals and values, the Committee selected two key observations for further reflection: the influence of goals and of educational values remains significant for individuals, but paradoxically it notes that these have little effect on school programs. The dynamism of the educational project seen as ineffective needs to be rejuvenated.**

1.3 Major organizational structures

It is difficult to speak of the school without mentioning its organization. This was constantly alluded to by those questioned. The regulations respecting the bases of school organization,[4] financial policies, collective agreements, administrative rules of the school board, etc. seem to determine, to a large extent, daily life in the schools. It is the ***school organization*** which, because of its regulatory status, appears to be the most decisive institutional component in the daily life of the school, and it guarantees, by means of organizational standards, minimal application of the basic discussion on goals and values. It is also, in a sense, the school organization that provides the operational model for all elementary and secondary schools. It determines the daily period of attendance at school, compulsory subjects per class and per cycle, the requirements for evaluation, the conditions for conferring diplomas and awarding passing marks. It lays down conditions for the integration of physically or intellectually impaired students, for special

4. Regulation respecting the basis of elementary school and preschool organization, Québec, 1981.
Regulation respecting the basis of secondary school organization, Québec, 1981.

rehabilitation services, for linguistic help for allophones and for special services for children from economically disadvantaged homes. It spells out parameters for additional services, whether they are dispensed directly by the school board or come from the health and social services sector. And, finally, it indicates requirements for management of the option between confessional moral and religious instruction and moral education.

It is recognized that the regulation respecting school organization has the great merit of giving Quebecers everywhere solid guarantees of accessibility and equality of opportunity. However, school staff members criticize it mainly because they feel it does not give the school sufficient room for manoeuvre in a real sense.

The schools also talk about the constraints imposed by ***collective agreements, financial policies*** and ***administrative regulations***: the number of student groups to deal with, the number of students per group, the rules governing assignment of staff and of resources, teachers' job descriptions, courses, remedial work, extracurricular activities, supervision and monitoring, the requirements of evaluation and local instructions for distributing report cards to parents. The combined effect of these elements seems to be one of rigid constraint.

> **The Catholic Committee notes a new essential element in its problematique on the educational project: the school often attributes its inability to introduce an educational project to the constraints of the system.**

1.4 Today's challenges

The testimony heard, with the regard both to many, well-established practices and to those situations that are deemed unsatisfactory, has revealed a number of inevitable challenges. These were identified as follows: the success of the students, attention to the individual progress of students, openness to cultural pluralism, integrated development of the student, assumption of responsibility for the school by those who live there.[5]

Success of the students

The schools realize that today practically all adolescents go to secondary school. Social objectives, which were expressed and promoted by the Parent Report in 1964, favoured democratization of the school at every level and an equal opportunity for all to attend. The challenge today has changed from one of education for all to quality education for all. The school wants to assure each student a chance to succeed. The secondary school diploma would seem to be a suitable objective for the greatest number.

Attention to the progress of individual students

One of the challenges of the coming years would seem to be to develop a form of teaching more active and specifically focussed on the student. The schools believe that motivation must be restored, the quality of the learning experience improved and the number of successful students increased. Such a goal requires a rejuvenation in teaching methods, and diversification of pedagogical approaches in terms of groups. It requires that each student have the opportunity for individual development motivating a mastery of basic knowledge and, particularly at the secondary level, a general culture.

Openness to cultural pluralism

The social and cultural environment of the school is increasingly characterized by an affirmation of pluralism: diversity of socioeconomic groups, ethnic communities, religious beliefs, cultural behaviour and intellectual aptitudes. The first challenge for the school, the public school in particular, would be to accept all young people with their unique characteristics, especially those of their acquired culture. The second is to help young people to understand and appreciate differences of all kinds. The school

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5. This confirms certain major challenges identified and described by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation. See Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1987-1988 *Annual Report on the State and Needs of Education. The Parent Report 25 Years Later*, Québec, 1988.

realizes that this is a new challenge to meet. Its program of study, organization, teaching methods, discipline, extracurricular activities and relations with families will have to be revised to meet this new challenge. It is essential that affirmation of one's own identity as well as an understanding of other cultures must be encouraged at one and the same time.[6]

Comprehensive development of the student

Society's present demand to re-centre the school on the acquisition of basic knowledge once again could be a danger to integrative development. The school must therefore reaffirm its basic commitment to the integrative development of the student. This implies that it encourage and demand greater participation of the student in his/her own formation. Implied as well is that teaching and other educational activities form a harmonious and balanced development of the student—heart, mind, body, spirit—as central to basic education. This demands that each participant see himself personally as an educator. Considering the fragmented, compartmentalized organization of pedagogical activities, a concern for integrative education on the part of all staff members constitutes a major challenge, particularly at the secondary school level.

The school dependent on those who live there: the educational project

The expression "educational project" encompasses many elements that have, to an extent, distanced it from its initial and basic meaning. On the one hand, it is important for the school to know where it stands at the moment, where it is going and how it is going to get there. On the other hand, it is essential that the strengths latent in the school be mobilized, leading—for some at least—to a greater assumption of responsibility.

The challenge for the school inherent in its educational project is not negligible. Nevertheless, it is a priority, one which the school must consider foremost if it hopes to come to grips with the important, concrete reality of other educational challenges today.

> **Five challenges appear to be major: success of students, concern for individual progress, openness to cultural pluralism, comprehensive development of the student and assumption of responsibility for the school by those who live there. According to the Catholic Committee, these challenges could also be today's principal challenges for the Catholic school and ideal opportunities for the integration of the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion.**

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The testimony heard reveals the complexity of those forces and constraints characterizing daily life of the school. The Catholic school must not allow itself to ignore these realities, for they are its concerns too, and must be taken into account in realizing the educational project.

6. See Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, ***Les Défis éducatifs de la pluralité***, Québec, 1987.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL IN QUÉBEC: VARIOUS PRACTICES, DIVERSE CONCEPTIONS

The study of the Catholic Committee regarding the educational project for Catholic schools has consisted mainly in asking two basic questions of the various agents in the school world:

— Do the Catholic schools want an educational project that takes their Catholic school status into account? If they do, what factors favour the project?

— What are the values that in fact characterize the Catholic schools or should characterize them as Catholic?

It was important to understand the actual situation of the Catholic schools: what goes on there and how it is viewed. With this approach, existing practices and conceptions could be identified. As well, sources of inspiration, stumbling blocks and ambiguities could be discerned regarding "integration of the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into the educational project, while maintaining respect for freedom of conscience and of religion".

2.1 Present practices

As Chapter One showed, most of the schools visited by the Catholic Committee had no true educational project. The reasons they gave were insufficient room for manoeuvre and an inability to arrive at consensus. Catholic schools, they said, experience the same difficulties as other schools. But they cited an added major difficulty. The silence surrounding the religious question in the school made for a further obstacle to defining the Catholic school's educational project. The schools are hesitant to bring up the religious question which, as is happening in society generally, is often felt to be a private matter left up to the free initiative of the individual. Nevertheless, the schools visited described a number of practices having to do with their confessional status.

In the following paragraphs we shall discuss these practices, identify sources of inspiration and some of the stumbling blocks in the preparation of an educational project for the Catholic school.

2.1.1 Schools make implicit connections between certain activities and the Catholic faith

Some of the Catholic schools visited by the Committee said that several of their educational activities have an implicit connection with religion, as with a Christian humanism, characteristic of Québec culture. The schools mentioned in this regard their concern for the comprehensive development of young people, training in personal responsibility and concern for youngsters in difficulty. Thus they describe activities of mutual support, sharing and solidarity. They also brought up certain projects for making the school more caring and less impersonal. The projects most often named were: group development, motivation workshops, school radio, leadership seminars, group activities, St. Valentine's day cards, sponsorship of students in difficulty, Christmas celebrations, etc. When asked to explain how these activities were connected with the Christian faith the schools generally related these activities to the love, demanded by the Gospel, notably concern for the poor.

2.1.2 In a number of Catholic schools, choice of one value takes the place of implementing an educational project

Some school representatives said that every year they selected an educational value to promote, the value of reading for example. The value chosen might be of an ethical nature: non-violence or respect are frequently mentioned. This ethical value and its practice, without being deliberately chosen in accordance with the school's Catholic status, often appeared to be connected with the Christian faith, at the very moment when the school is trying to demonstrate a posteriori the pertinence of its Catholic

statute. Nevertheless, the schools maintained that they did not place the pedagogical values pursued in relationship with the Catholic character of their school. The very purpose of the school, i.e. instruction and education, did not seem to them to be connected to a confessional concern.

2.1.3 Some schools entrust responsibility for the religious character of the school to religious education, pastoral animation, and the Christian community

Whether the Catholic school is asked about its strengths and weaknesses or about its practices with regard to its Catholic status, it first limits its answers to the specifically religious field: Catholic moral and religious instruction, pastoral animation, liturgical celebrations, religious symbols, ties with the parish and the religious practices of families. Sometimes as well, usually in a rural environment, and in particular at the elementary level, some staff members feel that witnessing their faith with their students is important. But generally speaking, faith is seen as a personal question and religion as a private matter. The school project conceived as being essentially pedagogical provides for time and physical space to assure the presence of religion in the school. Many staff members admit that they therefore do not feel bound by the confessional status of their school and pass their responsibilities in this regard on to others who appear to them to be more competent "to deal with religious matters". For them, Catholic moral and religious instruction, pastoral animation and participation in Christian communities are the essential components, usually the only ones, of the Catholic school.

Catholic moral and religious instruction

Religious instruction is unanimously considered to be an essential element of the Catholic school. It is the vehicle whereby the students who wish it are assured of a knowledge of the beliefs and values of the Catholic faith. Thus, Catholic moral and religious instruction and, at the secondary level, those who teach it are identified as signs of the confessional nature of the school.

For these reasons, the primary teacher as a generalist, does not feel at ease with the requirements of this task, deplores the difficulties involved in exemption and would like to see specialists take over the responsibility. But the general trend is not in this direction, especially at a time when the secondary school itself is tending towards greater versatility among its teaching personnel with a view to a more flexible combination of disciplines and more integration of learning. The Committee met elementary pupils who were very interested in religious instruction and capable of understanding some of the effects of such instruction in their lives. This was not, however, the feeling everywhere. Pedagogical and moral support for elementary school teachers seems to be a very important factor in the success of Catholic moral and religious instruction.

At the secondary school, the teachers of Catholic moral and religious instruction are often thought of first when a humanitarian project is in the offing; it is often they who are asked to organize the Christmas baskets or activities for welcoming incoming students, with the help of the pastoral animator. "You can count on them" was said to the Committee. Their competency, faith and motivation is appreciated.

Also, both the personnel and the students concerned feel that the major difficulties of Catholic moral and religious instruction are not the fault of the staff but of certain situations whose effects on the quality of the teaching should be pointed out. These are, mainly, the large number of groups of students to be taught, the number of students in each group and the new curricula. It is generally acknowledged, however, that the task of these teachers has been improved, by reorganizing certain programs — personal and social education, moral instruction and career choice education — and teaching those by semester, and through greater cooperation among staff members.

A good many teachers attribute their difficulties to three main interrelated causes, and the students

confirm this: first, the passive attitude of the students, which has gradually replaced the negative attitude of the period 1975 to 1980; second, the marginal status of this discipline, a result, it is said, of the importance given to science and mathematics; and, finally, the new curricula, about which the complaints are most numerous.

Like French, social studies and natural science, Catholic moral and religious instruction curricula are said to be overloaded, too constricting, implemented too quickly and without adequate teaching materials. At the secondary school particularly, they do not allow true spiritual, moral or religious learning. The goals and contents are too remote from the students' interests, apt to give answers to questions students have not asked and incapable of encouraging their participation in their own training. According to the students interviewed, Catholic moral and religious instruction, especially in the first three years of secondary school, does not offer any real meaning capable of throwing light on daily existence.

Pastoral animation

Pastoral animation is designated as an essential element of the Catholic school. It is counted upon like the Catholic religious and moral instruction staff, to assure the religious dimension of the school project. The situations in the elementary and secondary schools differ in this domain.

At the elementary level

It is not so long ago — the schools can recall the time — that pastoral activities at the elementary level were the responsibility of the parish priest, working in collaboration with the families and teachers. It was mainly a question of initiation into the first sacraments, and usually accompanied by some religious instruction for the children in their first contacts with the Christian faith.

Pastoral animation is taking its rightful place now in the elementary school as an educational service. The staff responsible, laypersons for the most part, plan, carry out and evaluate their activities in terms of the needs of the child and the school, liturgical or social occasions and in collaboration with Catholic moral and religious instruction. The staff's meetings with the students are usually part of the regular religious instruction timetable, but may also be part of school projects. Small groups may also meet at noon, pastoral and youth groups, for example. Their ties with the parish are also very important as they are the child's first direct contact with a Christian community. At the elementary school, the status of pastoral activities is dependent, as the schools well know, on their connection with the school and with the parish. Those responsible must therefore be able to count on the collaboration and support of the two communities of school and church for the harmonious and effective integration of pastoral animation into the school program.

Some schools have achieved real cooperation between these two communities, and speak of the gain for the elementary school of a more stable and better identified pastoral program. The person in charge of pastoral animation is introduced officially to the parish and the school committee, to families and students; is presented to the school team as a participant. This person plans and evaluates the objectives and the program in conjunction with the school administration; meets frequently with students who have opted for Catholic moral and religious instruction; advocates regular relations between the school and the Christian community through various activities, such as visits to church, liturgical and sacramental services, visits to the school by the priest, participation by parents and Christian volunteers, Christmas hampers, celebrations for Advent and Lent, UNICEF and activities with the elderly in the neighbourhood. In some elementary schools pastoral animation does not work well because several persons are assigned by the school — one for fourth year classes, another for fifth year classes, etc. — because of isolation from the parish, because one individual is designated for several schools, because of a lack of designated work space within the school or because of a lack of planning.

The elementary school, especially in rural areas, is geographically bound to the student's parish, as it is to their families. Even if church-going is relatively weak, there is a general attachment to the parish

and to religious rites into which parents want their children to be initiated. It is quite common for elementary schools to complain of the lack or scarcity of visits to the school by the priest. Pastoral animation in the elementary school generally represents, for parents and school personnel, the values inherent in worship, religious symbolism and charitable works. As for those in charge of this pastoral animation, they are appreciated for their vitality and competence, which help establish a good atmosphere in the school and assure the staff of religious support.

At the secondary level

In the secondary school, pastoral activities are recognized as an essential component of the Catholic school, both because of the experience of Christian life they provide for students receiving religious instruction and of their general contribution to the life of the school. They are usually perceived as an asset for the student's education. Without actually postulating a cause and effect relation, those involved feel that the climate of the school, as well as feelings of belonging and of solidarity, particularly within the pastoral committee, often depend on the dynamism of the pastoral animation. The most valued pastoral animators sit on the committees that play a large part in school life. They are leaders in humanitarian projects undertaken by the school, whether they design them or not. They know how to obtain assistance of various kinds from school staff and from families and the parish. They deal with students in difficulty who seek help or are referred to them by the school. Generally, there is a veritable traffic jam, on pastoral premises at noon hour, a symbol of openness and availability in the school. And it is often here that worship takes place for those who wish it. In Montréal's multi-ethnic schools, the pastoral animator is recognized as an important proponent of integration for allophones. This person may work with ethnic groups, make contact with their families and act as go-between with the community and the school.

Some comments about pastoral animators were less favourable; examples were given of some who, because of their age or personality, were overly discreet, of an inadequate student/counsellor ratio,[7] of pastoral activities that did not involve the whole school, of projects that were not of interest to the students and of activities that were not given sufficient publicity.

According to the testimony, pastoral animation, when given its proper place in the secondary school, is more accepted than it once was. Mandated by the Church and valued for the services that it renders, pastoral animation at the secondary level contributes to the significance of the confessional status of the Catholic school.

Relations of the school with Christian communities

In seeking what characterizes the Catholic school, school teams stress the importance of its ties with the Christian community. But in a sense it is because such ties are lacking that their importance is underlined. The schools speak more readily of the parish than of the Christian community, and point to the priest or another permanent parish representative. They describe one-way relations. On the other hand, the schools believe that an implicit expectation on the part of the parish puts pressure on them to encourage participation by young people in parish activities, attending Mass in particular. Yet they feel that their contribution to the religious and moral education of young people is not appreciated. Nor is their need recognized for theological and spiritual support in the exercise of their teaching. This need was expressed especially by elementary school teachers, who would like to have help from time to time to complement the development and formation offered by the Christian education counsellor.

As for the parishes, they do not hide their disquiet about the school. Involved as they are in our pluralistic society, persons working permanently for the parish are aware of the diverse religious trends, the confusion that reigns with regard to beliefs and the wide range of behaviour patterns. They are unsure

7. Pastoral animation generally have less impact if the ratio is greater than 1/1000. See Comité catholique, *L'École catholique, situation et avenir*, Québec, 1986, p. 16.

of what attitude to take towards adults in the school. And they do not always have a mastery of the pedagogical and psychological approaches proper to action with the young. So they often opt out.

The Committee heard expressions of dissatisfaction from both sides. Nonetheless, support for the Catholic schools by the Christian communities appears essential. The form such support takes will be determined by those involved on the basis of the common need to understand what is meant by faith today and how to communicate it.

2.1.4 In English Catholic schools, the general atmosphere is one of openness to religious expression

The social and historical situation of English language Catholics explains their attachment to religion and why most opt for the Catholic school. For them, education in religion is part of education, and it is normal that it have a special place in the educational project, even though in their personal lives some parents and staff members are not always consistent in attending church. The administration and staff of the school expect Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation to be clearly visible as an active part of the school program. For example, the school as a whole is present for liturgical celebrations marking the main events of the year; the priest frequently visits the students; community and social projects organized by the school's pastoral animator gathers large numbers of students and often their teachers. The general climate of the school is very open to religious expression.

2.1.5 Some Catholic schools are open to other beliefs

In the opinion of all the schools studied, respect for freedom of conscience and of religion is a basic value of the Catholic school. In the Montréal region, this value is in daily evidence.

The most telling testimony came from schools in Montréal where Catholics, Buddhists, Muslims, Baptists, Pentecostalists and so on live side by side. Of two of the nine schools visited, both elementary, in one 42 percent, in the second, 31 percent had pupils enrolled as Catholics; in the first, 60 percent, in the second, 46 percent of the pupils were enrolled in Catholic moral and religious instruction. The problems inherent with respect for freedom of belief are manifest. The schools need to make some decisions and develop practices in this regard, for the phenomenon is relatively new. The schools describe it as follows.

The school teams first of all said they do not know what the expectations of new Quebecers are with regard to religion in the school; the parents gave no indication of their preferences and the schools admitted they had made little attempt to find out. Language and social conformity are both drawbacks for new Quebecers, for whom a knowledge of the religion would be an integrating factor in Québec culture. Besides, several groups offer their own religious instruction outside the school. The rare needs expressed to teachers in the past concerned the initiation of the child into the first sacraments.

The second comment was in reference to existing practices with a view to respect for religious freedom. There are not many, but they testify to three real concerns: the option between Catholic moral and religious instruction and moral instruction, better adapted religious instruction and pastoral animation, and the celebration of religious festivals of non-Catholic groups.

The third comment illustrates the evolution of the Catholic school in this pluralistic context. The persons questioned had various viewpoints: a school without religion, a multi-confessional school, an open confessional school, a school with instruction in spiritual matters. One of the nine schools visited claimed to have undertaken a questioning of its status, but there was no follow-up. The general view is that parents should have a clearer idea of what confessional status means. One suspects, in fact, that in the long run generalized pluralism would not fit well into a confessional framework. Although the Catholic schools visited felt they did not put obstacles in the way of freedom of conscience, they claimed not to have the means to accommodate the various religious experiences and beliefs, and could not take them into consideration in Catholic moral and religious instruction. Some schools in pluralistic

environments wondered if they could remain Catholic, if they could live the differences positively, while respecting their own identity.

Concerning these practices, the Committee has pinpointed certain sources of inspiration and some stumbling blocks constituting reference points for a better understanding of section 4 of its Regulation.

Sources of inspiration

Certain schools recognize true, close affinities between school activities of a humanistic nature and the attitudes of Jesus, in particular those regarding the most disadvantaged persons.

Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation make an indispensable contribution to the Catholic school.

Openness to other beliefs is always mentioned as a characteristic of the Catholic school, and a challenge as well.

Support of the Catholic school by the Christian community appears vital.

Parents express at least a cultural attachment to the Catholic school.

Stumbling blocks in the way of the educational project of the Catholic school

The silence surrounding the religious question is an impediment to the definition of the educational project in the Catholic school.

The school's main preoccupation, education and instruction, often seems foreign to its confessional concerns.

The values and beliefs of the Catholic faith are integrated into the school almost exclusively through Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation.

Religious instruction is not always of real significance to the students or instrumental in helping them make sense of their daily lives.

In the schools in the Montréal region, marked by pluralism, the challenge of respect for freedom of conscience and of religion is a daily one, and it is becoming greater. It may be experienced by the Catholic school as a threat to its identity.

2.2 Various views of the Catholic school

School representatives, when they try to identify the characteristics of the Catholic school, end up posing the question of its identity today in the present socioreligious context. Views vary according to the values attached to the word "Catholic". The Committee would like first to describe the socioreligious context of which the schools claim to form a part, followed by various conceptions of the Catholic school given in the testimony heard. Lastly it will pinpoint sources of inspiration and ambiguities.

2.2.1 Catholic schools in the socioreligious context

The school representatives the Committee met spoke extensively of the socioreligious context of which they felt themselves to be a part: religious indifference and the insistently secular nature of public life are gaining ground, both among the students and their families as well; besides, the teachers tend to believe the school has been delegated the task of instructing the young in the religion, a task that families neither are able nor wish to assume. Religion is a private matter, personal faith evolves without external gestures or public rites. Religious groups are varied and numerous. Syncretism is on the rise. The word "Catholic" often refers only to Sunday observance and official morality of the Church, particularly with regard to sexuality.

This socioreligious complexity gives rise to various positions in regard to the school. There are not many schools which envisage the presence of religion other than within its function of the social context. Although the educational position in favour of the integrative development of the student is unanimously affirmed as a primary academic value, this does not function effectively at the moment of discerning the motivation for the presence of religion within the school project. The educational argument would not be its justification.

For many, the school's religious dimension should consist in providing religious services for the majority group, Catholic or Protestant, which frequents the school. For a small number of people, religion has no place in the school since it has little or no place in the family. Others feel that the school should offer more religious instruction; it should show authenticity and coherence in strengthening its demands on its staff and the student body as well as in demonstrating its allegiance.

This last position is that in particular of English Catholic schools, whose confessional identity is strongly asserted. Two factors underlie this position: on the one hand, the minority position of Anglo-Catholics in Québec and the fact that religion is an essential aspect of their culture and, on the other, attending a Protestant school always remains an option.

English Catholic schools apart, a good many of the Catholic schools visited are generally experiencing a sort of hiatus between the new socioreligious context and the traditional views of the Catholic school. These views are considered idealistic, that is, not consistent with the socioreligious climate of today.

2.2.2 Three "idealistic" views of the Catholic school

One view is that the Catholic school is where children receive their education in religion. It replaces the family, which is no longer truly Christian. This view was expressed in the testimony of teachers who would like to instruct the child in the verities of the faith, to celebrate it in class and in the school and to act according to religious prescription. This school would guide its students in prayer, in religious observances and the sacraments. It is said that such a school is no longer possible, for staff members have distanced themselves from active religious participation and the moral precepts of the Church.

Another idealistic view is of a Catholic school that incorporates Christian values into the whole of its school program. Every school project, all disciplines and all school activities would be imbued with the Christian faith. In such a school, the staff members would consider themselves witnesses to the faith and Christian values. The great moral dilemmas of today, such as homosexuality, abortion, divorce and contraception, would be discussed and taught by all according to the precepts of the Church. Celebrations of the liturgical year would play an important role.

The final idealistic view is of a Catholic school in which all beliefs other than Catholic ones are excluded. It would accept only Catholic staff and students, and would insist on this homogeneity as a guarantee of its consistency, cohesion and integrity. Religious pluralism is a threat to its confessional identity. According to this view, every religion should have its own school.

As opposed to these three idealistic views are three others that are more realistic, meaning, according to the testimony heard, more consistent with today's socioreligious context.

2.2.3 Three "realistic" views of the Catholic school

The first so-called "realistic" conception of the Catholic school is one which dispenses well designed Catholic moral and religious instruction and Catholic pastoral animation. The schools are convinced that they authenticate their status as Catholic schools by assuring to Catholics an education in the beliefs and values of the Catholic faith. This ensures that the student, becoming adult, is able to make a faith commitment with full knowledge of what he is committing himself to.

A second so-called "realistic" view is that of the Catholic school that transmits values. The whole school is committed to this pursuit by instilling one or more values selected on the basis of consensus. The confessional aspect is therefore not confined to specific times and places but permeates the life of the school for both personnel and students. The Catholic school is thus a community concern. Some teachers, in describing this type of school, spoke readily of the values selected for the educational project as Christian values, but most did not wish to qualify the values of the school as Christian. They are such human values as respect, acceptance of differences and concern for the disadvantaged. This view of the Catholic school seems more theoretical at the secondary level, for "one has the time for nothing but teaching, even though the atmosphere of the school would benefit from such attitudes".

The third so-called "realistic" view of the Catholic school is a humanistic school. It does not differ from others since it promotes the same human values, for example the integrative education of the student. Some school staffs even speak of a Catholic renewed awareness of humanistic values. They admit, strictly speaking, that the Catholic embraces the human, but they deny that the two are synonymous. For them the humanistic school is the only possible one.

These various views, particularly the so-called realistic ones, suggest sources of inspiration which could help in understanding section 4 of the Regulation of the Catholic Committee. They also conceal ambiguities felt by the Committee to be obstacles to the realization of the educational project.

Sources of inspiration

The values to be integrated in the educational project of the Catholic school would be ethical values related to altruism and should contribute to the spirit of the school.

It does not seem realistic to believe that a Catholic public school today should attempt to educate students in Christianity. This is the role of the Christian churches. However, the Catholic school would contribute to this formation.

It does not seem realistic today to expect all those working in the Catholic public school to adhere fully and to participate fully in the whole life of the Church.

According to some school representatives, a Catholic school should educate students in the broad sense while instructing them.

Ambiguities

In their testimony, respondents often made a distinction between human values and Christian values.

The Catholic religion is often identified with rituals, dogmatic teaching and moral prescriptions, and the school identifies itself as Catholic according to this framework.

When a school identifies itself as Catholic, it tends to stress those characteristics that distinguish if from other schools.

The pluralism of beliefs is sometimes perceived as a threat to the identity of the Catholic school.

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The preparation of an educational project is in itself a difficult undertaking. Within the Catholic school this preparation encounters ambiguous conceptions both of the Catholic religion and of the Catholic school. If these ambiguities were to be cleared up it would help the school define its project on the basis of sources already fundamental to it.

CHAPTER THREE

BEYOND AMBIGUITY

Certain ambiguous conceptions of the Catholic religion and the Catholic school may impede the definition of the educational project of a Catholic school, raising questions that constitute stumbling blocks. In most of the educational milieus, people are wondering what justifies and defines the Catholic school. They are seeking characteristics proper to the Catholic school, that distinguishes it from any other. They hesitate to call themselves Catholic because the word seems to be associated with a religious model that many feel is constraining or obsolete.

An attempt will be made in this chapter to eliminate certain ambiguities and define a number of concepts, then to pinpoint the basic components of the Catholic school, given its new situation in today's world.

3.1 A new situation

The people with whom we spoke expressed countless times the difficulty they have seeing the relevance of a Catholic school today in a culture that has apparently become areligious. They feel the school does not have to be more Catholic than society. As noted in Chapter Two, a number of people consider the Catholic school to be an anachronism. In fact, the Catholic school they refer to, whose legitimacy was formerly acknowledged, is a school in a Christian setting. A quasi-natural relation then existed between religion and the school, between the Church and the school. The Catholic character of the school was culturally legitimized by the fact that the community, both presumed and supported its existence. The school was in conformity with a community whose lifestyle was commonly accepted. The influence of religion was prevalent. The same Christian values were operative in the family, the school, the workplace and society generally. The principal milestones in life, both educationally and socially, were marked by religious and liturgical ceremony.

But Québec society has changed; it is less subject to the influence of religion. Virtually all the main spheres of life in society—science, economics, law, politics, trade unionism, welfare and health services—have won their autonomy from religion. The best within the Christian tradition had already helped to emancipate society from a sacramental vision of everyday living. Québec's Church leaders did not attempt to counteract the trend toward secular autonomy, but withdrew from the secular sphere in which they had long played supporting roles. The ecclesiastical institution as such no longer controls the rules of the game in a secular society; rather, it seeks to serve society by helping it to become more human and to achieve its goals in its own way.

Many will say that the school is the last bastion of Church power. However, the Québec episcopacy stated in 1978 that it is "urgent that a greater diversity be gradually introduced into our school system. Different types of schools are needed especially in cosmopolitan areas where a single school model proves to be inadequate to satisfy the needs of the people".[8] It also indicated that "parents are entitled to free access for their children to the riches of the heritage rooted in the Christian faith or inspired by it". But Catholic public schools are not schools of the Catholic Church. They are those of people who, on the local level, have decided that their schools are to be Catholic.

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8. Assemblée des évêques du Québec. ***Message from the Bishops of Québec to educators***. Montréal, 1978, p. 29, No. 37. See also Assemblée des évêques du Québec. ***Le Système scolaire et les convictions religieuses des citoyens***. Montréal, 1982, p. 11, Nos 17 and 18.

This change in institutions has been accompanied by a change in the public's behaviour in religious matters. Our society has become increasingly focused on production, consumption, individual performance and the "functionalization" of social relations. In this world of efficiency, values linked to volunteering one's time and to religion are confined to private life. This apparently areligious cultural environment favours the privatization of religion: religious behaviour is restricted to one's conscience or to the premises of the Church. Little religious faith is displayed in public. Out of discretion? Confusion? Disarray? From another standpoint, Christians are no longer the only believers. Immigration has brought Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews here. More than 800 groups claim new religion to fill the spiritual vacuum. This forces us to learn to live with religious pluralism. But Christianity is still also expected to take part in cultural life by providing a model for living and by making a humanitarian contribution in what is now a fragmented society. Part of a pluralist culture, Christianity takes its place in that culture in the very name of pluralism.

Our age is no longer that of Christianity. It is secular and pluralist, although a resurgence of and a trend toward the sacred are noted here and there. What then is the raison d'être of the Catholic school? What justifies its existence? These questions are apropos indeed. One argument immediately comes to mind: parents want Catholic schools. For the past several years, every time parents have been asked to choose the status of a new school, they have always responded in great numbers and a majority has always opted for a Catholic school. The parents with whom the Committee spoke do not agree with assertions that their choice is little informed or insufficiently motivated. They view things from another perspective. They say they want the best for their children to enable them to make enlightened religious choices. Even secondary school students say they want this type of school for their own children. There is a second, more implicit, but more fundamental and central argument: education. Religious education in Québec's schools is recognized and accepted on the basis of educational principles and the contribution it makes to the integrative education of the student. The Catholic school, for its part, actually insists that religion provide a frame of reference for its entire educational action. Finally, a third and legal argument: the new Education Act, which came into force on July 1, 1989, recognizes the legal possibility of religion in school, acknowledging its educational relevance. Indubitably because of our long Christian cultural tradition, handed down here from generation to generation, which many still treasure, Québec society wishes to preserve the religious dimension of the educational project. According to the Act, Québec's Catholic and Protestant students are now entitled to religious instruction and pastoral animation in the schools they attend. Furthermore, all schools may integrate religious beliefs and values of a religious tradition into their educational projects.

The Catholic school is therefore at a crossroad. The Education Act urges it to define itself, but those who have the task of defining the Catholic school are perplexed. Their problem is not foreign to the new relationship between faith and culture. The public school has its own culture, described in Chapter One. The public Catholic school must implement its educational project in this secular setting by integrating into it the beliefs and values of the Catholic faith. Christians within the school recognize that their task is to act within the context of the culture of the school. They want to contribute to choosing the orientation of the school, in developing the organization of the school, and improving its structures. In the name of the Gospel, which urges them to build a better world, they seek to establish a dialogue with the school. It is within this dialogue that the educational project for the Catholic school will be worked out. The project will be established according to the will of each school, and the needs and characteristics of the milieu. The basic components of the educational project are described below.

3.2 Four characteristics of the identity of the Catholic school

It is worthwhile to recall that the new Education Act links the identity of a school to its educational project. According to the Regulation of the Catholic Committee, the Catholic school "shall integrate the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into its educational project, while maintaining respect for freedom of conscience and religion". The Catholic school is defined according to its educational project. In designing and implementing its project, it selects and promotes the values and beliefs to which a Catholic school is devoted and which characterize it. A number of questions arise as to exactly what characterizes the Catholic school.

When, at the hearings, representatives were asked if they felt their schools could be called Catholic, they spontaneously looked for the characteristics that distinguish it from another school and which specify it as Catholic.

To question the specificity of the Catholic school may not go to the heart of the matter. The Catholic school, certainly, is one which integrates the values and beliefs of the Catholic religion, whereas another school may reject or practically ignore such integration. But with this definition the final word is not said.

The Catholic school recognizes itself according to certain characteristics. A characteristic is a particular trait, but not always exclusive, a distinctive attribute or quality not necessarily unique, an indication or identifiable sign without being wholly particular.

What characterizes a school is what gives it an image, a flavour, a colour and an identity of its own without distinguishing it radically and without being exclusive. A characteristic is part of the school's identity, but may be shared by other types of schools.

The Catholic school is identified with certain values, but these may be shared by others. ***What is important is that these values be found in the Catholic school and that it function according to them in the name of its Christian commitment. The goal of the school's educational project is inspired by referents specifically identified as Christian.***

3.2.1 First characteristic: a bias for education

Most of the people with whom the Committee spoke admitted that concern for integrative education is not sufficiently shared by everyone in the school. The teaching staff assigned to some given subject seems to find it very difficult to promote general educational goals, notably in the secondary school. Rather, the teacher seeks to concentrate on a given subject, which is, certainly, a first duty. And maximum concern for the quality of teaching and the success of the students is expected. The Catholic school in fact places a high value on the task of teaching and educating. It does so in the name of the Gospel, which values every dimension of the individual; innate strength and quest for the infinite, calling for the fruition of individual talents, never losing hope in one's ability to recover from failure, attending to the weak and trusting in growth and freedom. To pursue the work of the Creator means to develop a student's intelligence, to help acquire technical skills, to promote meaningful relationships and to transmit the knowledge and wisdom accumulated through the ages.

The Catholic school therefore demands that all the staff see, not only to the instruction and intellectual development, but also to the integrative education of all students. Elementary school pupils receive this comprehensive education first and foremost in the classroom, from teachers who favour integrated learning and the full development of the child. At the secondary level, education must be everyone's concern. Each specialist evidently has a given educational responsibility. The nurse takes care of the body, the psychologist, the personality, the teacher of religious instruction, the student's spiritual life... Responsibilities can and should be distributed in this way. But education also depends on common objectives to be shared and considered by everyone. But that in fact constitutes the educational project, which provides a certain climate that transcends and influences all interventions and activities in an environment of quality. It consists in decisions that are made with respect for the student, attention to needs, interest in success and concern for well-being. Such an environment, to which everyone contributes, educates the whole student. The Catholic school places prime emphasis on education. ***Its educational mission is its only mission.*** It is one of its essential components, offered in the very name of its Christian commitment, which gives it the grounds for promoting the human person, thereby enabling the school to participate, with the other schools in Québec, in the overall education of young Quebecers.

One very specific facet of the education of young people — ***the development of a conscience and social responsibility*** — is urgently needed and has not been sufficiently taken into consideration until now. The realization that the future of humanity rests above all on our ability to make moral choices, individually and collectively, is gradually becoming universally recognized. A number of matters are of worldwide concern and must be tackled from an essentially ethical standpoint, i.e. according to what is good or bad for human dignity, survival and growth of humanity. The entire world needs men and women whose moral conscience is attuned to the universal values of peace, international solidarity, social responsibility, fraternity, justice and protection of the environment. A number of countries and international bodies such as UNESCO have expressed concern for the development of moral conscience and social responsibility. These constitute generally the two facets of the concept of "ethical formation" promoted by these organizations.

Instruction and experiences in the classroom and school offer many opportunities to learn these social values and transcendence. In a society characterized by production, consumerism and competition, the call to go beyond the self suggests that a choice must be made "to be" rather than "to have". By developing students' conscience and sense of social responsibility, the Catholic school forms them to play their role in the human family. It promotes civil living. It is not only the Catholic school which is concerned, but such a school is strongly challenged to accomplish this task precisely because of its educational mission carried out in the name of Gospel.

3.2.2 Second characteristic: the significant contribution of Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation to the religious, moral and social formation of young people

A great many students with whom we spoke mentioned how difficult it is for them to see the significance in their lives of the religion they learn in school. This observation should challenge the school. It appeals in a very special way to the school's responsibility for Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation. The problem is not exclusive to the Catholic school. Non-confessional schools and schools of other confessions must deal with it as well. But it is a vital one for the Catholic school. It is worthwhile recalling the comments made in this regard in ***Religion in Today's School***,[9] an important publication of the Catholic Committee. Paragraph 47 reads:

> ***By its very nature, religion constitutes a meaning system. Semantically, the word religion remains perplexing, but a hint about the role of religion is found in its etymology, the word being derived either from relegere (to re-read the world and to discover its meaning) or from religere (to bind the world together, to give it meaning by setting up networks of significance). Essentially, the religious attitude consists of a re-reading or re-interpretation of the world, of man, and of transcendent reality. It would be surprising (to say the least), if schools were to prohibit entry into this sphere of meaning at the very period in young people's lives when they are striving to map out their paths through the world. The message of religion cannot provide them with ready-made meanings, but it will challenge them to discover meanings for themselves or to improve on those proposed. Religion can give students guidance and strength based on a consistent vision of the world. It can also offer them the fruits of the spiritual quest that has been carried on by innumerable generations of mankind. It can throw meaningful light on questions that neither science nor technology can fully elucidate because neither of these approaches can express man in his fullness.***

It is a prime responsibility of the Catholic school to ensure ***that the educational and social relevance of Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation is more clearly perceived and better promoted*** by the staff dispensing them, by the students and by all those who make the school what it is.

Good working conditions in regard to timetables, number of periods and classes, equipment, support by colleagues are, of course, required. But, although they favour learning, these conditions do not automatically guarantee the students' motivation and interest, whereas a lack of motivation or interest compromises religious education. The Catholic school should therefore ensure that learning situations

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9. Catholic Committee, ***Religion in Today's School***, Québec, 1974.

are closely tied to the religious questioning of young people and their daily experiences. Programs, textbooks, teaching methods, and staff training and development must be taken into consideration as much as the general educational environment in the school.

Catholic schools that offer moral instruction must guarantee that its quality equals that of religious instruction. What is good for one should be good for the other. A number of Catholic schools must make some changes in this regard. They must make the transition from a mentality still prevalent that allows students to be exempt from Catholic moral and religious instruction to one that allows them to choose between the two options.

The Catholic school must also ensure that religious instruction makes an original, essential, and indispensable contribution to the ***development of moral conscience***. This is a monumental challenge. It consists in forming the student's moral judgment. The Christian tradition has always promoted the development of an enlightened conscience. As its name indicates, Catholic moral and religious instruction should explicitly target this objective. Not only should students learn the Church's moral teachings, but they should gradually learn to apply them without being absolved from the preliminary examination and analysis of the moral situation confronting them. Catholic religious instruction should teach the student to consider all the elements of a moral situation, in addition to the standards involved, and to ask what the right choice is to behave in a truly responsible manner. This is essential to learning moral autonomy. It is a challenge to the Catholic school and to the training and development of its teachers.

Lastly, Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation must also ***contribute to the development of social responsibility***. As we have seen, the future of the human family is closely tied to the sense of social responsibility of individuals and solidarity between peoples. Catholic moral and religious instruction, certain pastoral animation activities and the actions of young people are privileged opportunities for students to learn how to participate in Christian social action. Catholic schools have already committed themselves to this. One need only consider Amnesty International, World Day of Peace, World Youth, the faith and social justice movement and human rights education. Now more than ever, religious activities in the school must witness to social relevance in order to favour the education of students in a faith that is publicly committed.

3.2.3 Third characteristic: the human growth of the student and of the educational milieu

The Committee noted that a number of schools have called for humanist objectives and practices. Humanism, which is not exclusive to the Catholic school, is often closely tied to values inspired by Christianity that are part of our cultural heritage. It is not self evident, however, that these values and practices are rooted in the Gospel. It is as if one were confronted with an inability to make the Christian commitment explicit. Some are reluctant to identify themselves as Christians in our society. This may be at times due to an unequivocally religious conception of Christianity as a closed, compartmentalized, dogmatic and morally rigid system or model, open only to the faithful. There seems particularly to be a gap between Christian faith and human values. However, the Christian faith is, in fact, based on Jesus Christ's teaching, which is centred on promoting the Kingdom of God and which consists precisely in building a new, just and brotherly world according to the Creator's scheme, and in bringing humanity to its fullest expression.

Therefore, when the school seeks values of the Catholic religion to be integrated into its educational project, it cannot go wrong with those values that work in harmony to achieve the human growth of the student and of the educational milieu. The school's choices, like those of society, are then of utmost importance and require the participation of all, regardless of their beliefs.

Furthermore, it is the reponsibility of Catholic moral and religious instruction and pastoral animation to illuminate the source of these values and their expression in Christianity's foremost beliefs. ***It is the duty of the Catholic school to promote the humanization of the school and of the student in the very name of its Christian character. It has no monopoly on the human, but the human is characteristic of its identity.***

3.2.4 Fourth characteristic: its Catholic character

Many of the people the Committee heard admitted that they hesitate to say they are Catholic or to qualify their school as Catholic. Personal reasons or cultural factors may explain much of their reticence, for example irregular attendance at Mass or questions about the official moral teachings of their Church. But there is also some misunderstanding as to what "Catholic" means, which demands a broader interpretation of the word.

Catholics are first and foremost Christians. Of course, they belong to a specific Christian tradition, but their shared faith grounded in Jesus Christ identifies them as Christians. It is essentially this Christian vision of the person and of human life that inspires the educational project of the Catholic school.

Secondly, ***the concept "Catholic" is not univocal.*** It is analogical, that is, it can have different meanings. A traditionalist is a Catholic, while a progressive is a Catholic in a different way. An elementary school with 150 pupils, run exclusively by religious, is Catholic, while a comprehensive school with a thousand students, which has applied for recognition of its Catholic character, is also Catholic. And an English-language school, established many years ago, is Catholic as well in its particular way. There is no single model of a Catholic school. Comprehension and extension of the concept of being Catholic depends on time, place and context.

Thirdly, ***belonging to the Church is not uniform.*** There are active Christians who are truly integrated into the life, functions and services of their Christian community. There are the mass of practicing Christians who are more or less attached to their community. There are those who have taken some distance from the liturgical life, from a given teaching, from the ecclesial institution, but who hold their affiliation dear and who witness by Christian practice in daily life. Is it not, first and foremost, belief in Jesus Christ and his gospel message that is essential to membership in the Christian community? The Church still brings together the faithful, and there are several paths possible by which one may adhere to a Christian community. Not everyone has managed to integrate all the dimensions of the Christian faith into their lives. There is much room for questioning, development and learning. There is also a pluralism of thought in Catholicism all of which must coexist in the Church and the school. Besides the conservatives, traditionalists, progressives and protesters, there are those who, in their religious behaviour, stress the spiritual quest, moral imperatives, worship, charismatic experiences or social or even political action. This diversity is found in the Catholic school, and in local communities that apply for Catholic status for their school. And what about the different avenues of development and discovery for young people who have not yet made their choices? This calls for respect for pluralism of models and consideration of persons on the basis of their individuality. But this also involves issues affecting education and choices proposed which facilitate integration.

Fourthly, ***reference to the terms "Christian" and "Catholic" is not ideological, for the terms do not demand an acceptance devoid of freedom of thought.*** Educators seem to believe the opposite is true. They mention their great difficulty and discomfort in dealing with questions of sexual morality, for example. The positions of the Church seem inflexible to them. They feel it is better to avoid the matter altogether. In this case as well, a number of ambiguities must be dispelled. First of all, the Christian faith and its beliefs, before becoming a system of thought, are a human and spiritual experience and tradition originating in the words and action of Jesus Christ. The word of God does not answer all questions; in fact, it raises a great many. These questions, to which the word of God has no set answers, require even more reflection and discussion on the part of Christians. This is true notably in questions of natural morality in particular. The Church magisterium remains of course the authorized interpreter of questions of faith and morality for Christians. But there are various degrees of authority among official pronouncements, depending on their content and objectives. There is even a hierarchy of beliefs in Christianity: a distinction must be made between the importance of basic Christian beliefs and that of certain peripheral or secondary beliefs.

All Christians are called to take responsibility for their beliefs. A maximalist conception of infallibility has held sway in our community, although, in fact, it has only rarely been put into practice. Informed and responsible Christian thought must be capable of discerning between the few, irrevocable dogmas, and the ordinary teachings which Christians retain the right to question in their conscience and before God. We must know how to differentiate between a pronouncement on the occasion of an encyclical, a theological opinion regarding a definition of dogma and a disciplinary measure taken on the basis of a doctrinal teaching. Moral discernment, notably in regard to specific ethical questions to which the Scriptures do not provide clear, decisive answers, requires recourse to one's conscience, a basic principle that has always been recognized by the Church. The magisterium provides objective teaching intended to enlighten the judgment of conscience. However, Christian and ecclesial thought comprises as well interpretation of the New Testament, the witness and sense of faith of the faithful, theological reflection, the studies and debates of experts.

The Catholic school must have teachers who are able to distinguish these nuances, for example in situations where sexual morality is involved. These teachers must explain doctrine with respect and precision, and they must clarify not only the moral theological principles that underlie sexual practices, but the human and Christian meaning of sexuality, love, marriage and the confident transmission of life, and bring the student to the point where he can make responsible choices before God and according to his conscience. Between inflexible teachings and unenlightened silence, there is room for education that is open to a demanding moral behaviour, which comprehends the meaning of the realities, the situations, the progress and the learning. The Catholic educator in the Catholic school must feel respected as an intelligent believer and a skilled teacher. The initial training, development and retraining of teachers must therefore deal not only with programs but also include the contemporary questions and issues which call forth the responsibility of today's believer.

Fifthly, ***the term "Catholic" evokes openness toward universality.*** Since Vatican II, the Catholic church, by returning to its roots, has had to reconsider its attitude toward religious freedom, and to revise its consideration of all Christian denominations and other religions. Christians recognize that they are only a fraction of humanity. They have also recognized that they share with all men and women of good will the struggle for human dignity. This marks a shift from a less open attitude in religious matters. The Church recognizes each person's right to choose his own path to truth. It recognizes that professing or not professing a faith depends ultimately on one's conscience. The Catholic school develops this fundamental attitude in regard to the various religious options within it. It expects the same respect on the part of those who attend it.

To uphold its character as Catholic, the Catholic school must first retain its fundamental commitment to the Christian faith. Called upon to clarify its identity, the Catholic school must find its inspiration in a faith conveyed by its own particular tradition. As well, in the very name of its faith, it must welcome people of all religious beliefs.

3.3 Profile of the Catholic school

It is hoped that a number of ambiguities have been eliminated and certain basic components of the Québec Catholic school pinpointed in this chapter, thereby providing the following profile of the Catholic school.

- Its educational mission is its only mission. This mission is eminently respectable, as are those who carry it out on a daily basis.

- Its educational challenges are human challenges that it cannot dismiss as a school. It takes part in the education of Quebecers. It carries out the indispensable work of promoting civilization among its students, notably through intellectual development, training, formation of conscience and the development of a sense of social responsibility.

- Christians in the school are, above all, educators whose professional competence in the service of each student is a witness to their faith.

- Active participation by everyone in the school, notably that of Christians, in the educational project and its specific activities promotes the education and self-realization of each student.

- The Gospel, in the hearts of the Christians, motivates them to make the school more educational and more human.

- Christians within the school ensure that specific times and places, notably for Catholic religious and moral instruction, pastoral animation, and periods of reflection, favour growth in faith of both students and adults who so desire.

These are just a few of the main features of the Catholic school. Far from eliminating the freedom of the school, they are aimed at making it possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POSSIBILITIES OF REALITY

It is hoped that section 4 of the Catholic Committee Regulation has been clarified in the preceding pages. A brief profile of the Catholic public school in a pluralist, secular society has been drawn. It illustrates that the Gospel is a source of inspiration and a driving force for Christians working in the school. This highlights the unique contribution of the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion for an educational project.

Other concrete questions now arise. What beliefs and Catholic religious values are apt to inspire a given school? How may these be integrated into the school? Is not the Catholic school suspect in regard to respect for freedom of conscience and of religion?

In Chapter Four, we will try to provide some answers —a few real possibilities. First, the challenge to any school, denominational or secular, of designing its educational project is considered. A school discovers or rediscovers the dynamics of its establishment. It examines itself regarding its success in educating its students. Then, second, the chapter considers a challenge for the catholic school in animating this educational project with the Gospel teachings.

4.1 The educational project or the challenge to the school to refocus itself

So many things have already been said about the educational project, particularly since the ***Policy Statement***.[10] How can this be discussed in new terms? Factors that favour its development were suggested in Chapter One, i.e. the participation of all, a shared conviction about certain educational goals and values, flexibility in regard to the main organizational structures and common challenges. The absence of any one of these factors constitutes an obstacle.

4.1.1 A decision, trust and a conviction

The perception that the obstacles are insurmontable must be overcome if the avenues proposed here are to lead to success. ***An educational project is established on the basis of a decision, trust and a conviction*** —a decision by the school to refocus itself, a complete trust among the staff and a conviction that the quality of education has everything to gain through the project. There is the conviction in the Catholic school that the Christian vision makes a relevant, original contribution to the educational project. It is generally the school administration that must have the boldness to pursue the enterprise. It hopes to have administrative support from the school board, but knows that the initiative to examine itself can only come from within the school.

The new Education Act entrusts the orientation committee with responsibility for determining the orientation of the educational project. Although this legal requirement may get things started, it will probably not automatically result in the emergence of real educational projects. It is hoped that the various school staff members on the orientation committee will facilitate the participation of the majority of school agents to take part in the drafting of a common project. The procedures of the orientation committee should permit discussion and make it possible to arrive at a consensus. The Committee, along with the principal of the school, must first have a clear idea of the school's mission.

4.1.2 A clear idea of the school's mission

It is worthwhile to restate the mission of the school, at least its new emphasis at the dawn of the 21st century: the integrative education of all students by every educator in the school. This may be a self-evident truth to some of the school staff, but, for many, it is a necessary and stimulating reminder of a common

10. Ministère de l'Éducation, ***The Schools of Québec: Policy Statement and Plan of Action.***

purpose, without which there can be no true educational project. The major challenges listed in Chapter One are, generally speaking, recognized by the people with whom the Catholic Committee met: the largest possible number of students' obtaining a Secondary School Diploma, each student's receiving the educational attention he requires, openness to young people and families from different cultures and integrative education.

If a school's educational project has a clear educational mission and if the project succeeds in meeting such a challenge, perceived as inevitable, it is a promising project, firmly rooted in reality. Thus firmly rooted, the project will correspond to the daily objectives that a given school sets for itself to meet the major challenges of education in Québec. These objectives may involve parents as well as the staff, thereby reducing the ideological differences so often deplored. The one issue facing everyone is then the student's success.

4.1.3 Objectives within a changing school

These major challenges facing Québec schools will not remain theoretical if they are translated into precise objectives, defined according to the particular needs of the students. Given a situation that is deemed unsatisfactory, for example the isolation of an ethnic group or a lack of interest in reading, a school team will foresee the desired situation, formulate it in terms of objectives to be attained, then determine the activities through which the objective will be achieved. ***The team thereby sets in motion a process of change, motivated and directed by shared convictions and values.*** This implies that the greatest possible number of partners participate in the choice of the priorities and the educational objectives that they wish to pursue. This collective project is an opportunity for an exchange of various viewpoints, negotiations, reciprocal influence, mutual consensus and decisions. This very process brings about the integration of the educational values that the team finally adopts as characteristics of its educational project.

The challenge of cooperation is an enormous one. Educators say they have to contend with individualism, the inertia of the milieu, weak leadership, differing expectations on the part of parents and the staff, and reticence about the concept of an educational project. Without dismissing or minimizing these difficulties, we have to believe that the major challenges of education in Québec have some chance of being taken seriously. Otherwise we concede defeat from the very start. These challenges affect the future of young Quebecers to the highest degree, they correspond to profound expectations of parents in regard to the school and they explicitly call for the professional competence of the staff.

Viewed in this way, as an educational imperative, the educational project of the school in no way resembles a theoretical debate about values. ***It is the statement of educational objectives to be attained and of activities relevant to the educational success of each student.*** It implies a decompartmentalization of educational activity and can only be achieved by giving greater value to the staff. It also implies, for most people, the capacity to collaborate and to work as a team. It requires time and space to implement the project, adjustments along the way and periodic evaluations. Therefore, it is hoped that each individual in the school will participate actively or at least give his consent. The result: belonging to a school wherein the educational process is mastered for the greatest benefit of the student.

4.2 The educational project and integration of beliefs and values of the Catholic religion

Section 4 of the Catholic Committee Regulation is explicit: a school that is recognized as Catholic "integrates the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into its educational project, while maintaining respect for freedom of conscience and of religion".

4.2.1 Reference to beliefs and values

Whether it is denominational or not, a school conveys beliefs and values, i.e. convictions about human and social realities, the student, the educational approach and the educational system. These mark human relations in the school and the means and goal of education that the school sets for itself, pedagogical dynamics and the choices on which decisions are based. The school has a vision of its reality and conveys messages in at least an indirect or implicit manner.

It is to the school's advantage to explicitly clarify these references. When the educators and administrators in a school decide on an educational project, they analyse the situation within the school, its students' needs and the milieu it serves. They agree on the convictions that will make school life progress in the path they have chosen. They define educational principles and their consequences. There is no education, without a conception of humanity, without a vision of the human person today called to live in tomorrow's society.

The establishment of an educational project for the Catholic school implies that this analysis is based on the educational tradition of the milieu and is derived explicitly from the central convictions of the Christian religion. It is certainly not the school's task to proselytize, for the duties of the school are not those of the Church or the parish. ***But the religious dimension can rightfully be integrated into the educational project of a school, which will find in it a frame of reference that inspires, develops and directs its educational action.***

Paragraph 65 of ***Religion in Today's School*** is pertinent in this regard, for it states that the school is where the student can search for a meaning to life and experience different meanings that are transmitted.

> ***Given this context, the Christian understanding of man and of life can be a valuable contribution to the school's educational programme. It can offer a rallying point for educators who agree about the heights and the depths and the full scope of human existence. In this way, Christian faith can help to define the aims of educational institutions. This would not necessarily mean that all members of the staff must fully accept that vision of the world, but the group as a whole would use it as a frame of reference and an axis of coherence in their work as educators. From this angle we can see the confessional character of a school as a useful parameter in the implementation of an educational programme.***

A school that has chosen to be Catholic must maintain, by means of its educational project, a threshold of coherence in regard to the specific beliefs and values of the Christian faith.

Beliefs of the Catholic religion

Religious beliefs are statements that express the content of a faith as knowledge and an object of consent. "Faith" and "beliefs" should therefore be strictly differentiated so as to better unite them and show their interdependence.

A faith is a position taken in regard to that which ultimately gives meaning and direction to existence. To be a believer is to opt for a meaning in faith and to find in that option the key to an understanding that provides reasons for living. Faith is therefore a personal attitude that commits a human being in this very core, in his inner being, where fundamental options are decided upon. This personal attitude can also be that of a community, where it may be recognized by a common theme or symbolism. The faithful perceive that the Meaning sought, the Ultimate, the Absolute is neither an overwhelming idea, nor a vital force nor an indeterminate power, but a personal Being. And it is in Jesus Christ that they recognize the meaning of this God who is present as the meaning of human life and its destiny. In God, they encounter the symbol, the proposal for a way of life.

But faith is impossible without beliefs. It needs a system of teachings, of convictions, of "truths" that echo the words of Jesus, that reflect authorized interpretations and which unfold their content through understanding. Faith requires these in its understanding, its expression and its communication. The principal Christian beliefs are found notably in the New Testament, and their core is expressed as a synthesis in the articles of the ***Our Father*** and the ***Credo***.

What are these beliefs? The Christian believes that from the creative intelligence originates the world, whose laws and possibilities are forever being discovered. This God gives life to men and women, equal in dignity, created in God's image and established as responsible managers of this world.

And Jesus, the human image of God in history, recalls the logical relationships underlying everything within this world, culminating in love, which is the condition for full self-realization and human happiness. In Him, God reveals Himself as Father, urging universal brotherhood. Jesus of Nazareth laid the foundation for a human community called to realize the project of the Kingdom of God. The Church, the community of the followers of Jesus, is the chosen instrument for this project. It preaches it, helps to build it, experiments with it and becomes its sign for the wider world.

Building the Kingdom of God is the very core of Jesus' message and ministry. The Reign of God is the fulfilment of the creative, redeeming scheme of God for all creation. It is manifested when human dignity, justice, freedom and the reconciliation of humans with themselves, with each other and with God comes about. It is manifested when selfishness, evil, violence, sin and all forms of alienation are conquered. The Kingdom of God comes about as humanity is fulfilled, is made new, and achieves the transparency and plenitude which it must have to become fully human. All this would remain merely utopian if Jesus had not already initiated it by his ministry to people, his denunciations, his calls to go beyond the self, his solidarity with suffering, his commitment to the poor, the rejected, the unwanted. Jesus' entire life brings salvation, righting wrongs for those who have no hope. He made God's cause for humanity his own and did not waver, despite the opposing forces that led him to a violent death. The resurrection sanctioned his life of faithfulness to decisive options. Through Him, God won victory over death itself. The first to rise from the dead, Jesus brought with Him the promise of resurrection, since, through Him, God is made historically real and irrevocably present within the world to free human persons fully and definitively.

Christians still believe that Jesus transmits to them his Holy Spirit, who recalls what Jesus did and said. The Spirit gives to each one a charism for the service of all, and is the creator of personal and community renewal. The Holy Spirit inspires each of us to choose a way of life, to become a person in the service of others, who participates in the advent of the Reign of God in the world in which we live. The Christian project for humanity and the world is thereby given new impetus, refocussed, regenerated and radicalized.

These beliefs can mobilize us. They are not confined to doctrinal formulations, but are evocative of a human potential that is rich, liberating and gives a framework to life. ***An educational project inspired by these beliefs cannot fail to promote each individual*** as unique, fundamentally deserving and worthy of love, called to self-fulfilment despite limitations and hesitations. The innermost substance of the human person, one's personal mystery, the history of one's joys and sorrows, demands respect and assistance in the form of words and concrete action. An individual merits all the attention required to develop intelligence, to enhance self-esteem, to learn to live in freedom while showing respect for others, using one's talents and cherishing life. ***Mutual love is the golden rule.*** It has many names: solidarity, affection, forgiveness, concern, justice, peace, the defence of the weakest among us. ***Such an educational project focusses on learning to take responsibility,*** motivating each individual to discover and take one's place in the society to be built, to make a contribution according to each one's capacities, regardless of competition and appearances, and to courageously retain hope despite difficulties. ***Lastly, the project favours activities that make it possible to name what motivates Christians,*** what leads them progressively to make choices and to discover within themselves a spirituality in keeping with their age and means.

Values of the Catholic religion

A value is that which really counts, that which has worth and scope. A value expresses a preference and therefore implies an appreciation or judgment. It reflects a choice, is founded on convictions and motivates one to act accordingly.

Faith and beliefs, on the one hand, and the values to be promoted, on the other, are closely linked. There are Christian values — values that refer to the originality of Christian thought about fundamental human themes. Of course, the founts of wisdom are part of the heritage of human thought and experience. Christians share them, with the singular enlightenment offered by Christianity. Many fundamental human values are, in fact, focussed on and even given new impetus by Jesus and the first Christian communities. Values are thus proposed by the faith and beliefs of the Christian religion. But there are also subjective factors involved in these values, for they depend on our evaluation of them and preference for them. What values should be chosen as particularly worthy of promotion when developing an educational project? Some values reflect certain beliefs that are perceived as important according to the choices of a school team as well as the energy devoted to making them.

Christianity undertakes the divine task itself as an undertaking of educating people as believers. Coming to fruition over an extended period, this education is a work of filial duty, consisting of concern, trust, teaching and wisdom, but also of exhortation, fraternal correction and patience in the exercise of freedom, thereby revealing the person to himself and offering growth in his life. Jesus urged his disciples to do exactly this: to welcome, to teach and to guide. This fundamental logic necessarily defines the framework of the educational concern within a Catholic school and the values it hopes to perpetuate.

The Catholic school lays stress on certain values in the name of faith in Jesus Christ. Such values might include fraternity, growth in the humanity of the student and the milieu, friendship among young people of different cultures, respect for others and their rights, appreciation of nobility, commitment, spiritual quest, and responsibility in regard to wealth and its fair distribution. The school can also denounce attitudes that wound the human and block its realization, such as inordinate competition, sexism, racism, verbal and physical abuse, escaping into noise at the expense of one's inner life, isolation in cultural and religious ghettos, scorn and indifference.

4.2.2 Integrating the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into the educational project

Integration of the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion characterizes the educational project of a Catholic School. This means that the school views the contribution made by Christian beliefs and values to its educational project as decisive. This singular contribution is a component of its educational project, an essential frame of reference for the project's coherence and cohesion.

Integration of these beliefs and values into the school, through Catholic religious and moral instruction and pastoral animation, is basic and fundamental. The Catholic school gives great importance to these activities, which enable a student who wishes to do so to come into contact with the Christian faith and Catholic tradition, and to develop his own Christian identity. The individual witness by students and adults to their faith in Christ also has an influence in the school.

Although these two modes make present and vital Christian inspiration in the school, they are not sufficient to integrate the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into the educational project. ***The educational mission of the Catholic must, first of all,*** be closely tied to the Christian vision of the human person, of life and of the universe, that is, it must be perceived as a true force for the humanization of the world. Thus, the Christian faith and tradition are initially integrated into the educational project through the school's conception of its mission.

There is another path to integration, first when the educational project is developed, then when it is implemented. ***In sharing convictions about education, the influence of the Christian faith can become manifest.*** This influence affects the choice of common objectives and activities. The educational project of the Catholic school must provide the conditions required for its proper implementation. The project is subjected to the interpretation of the Gospel essentially when it is being developed and implemented, for it is in the Gospel that it finds its identity. Integration of the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion is an active concern of Christians in the school. Their participation in the educational project makes it possible.

In most Catholic schools, Catholics are in the majority. They know each other and are in the same groups. Their solidarity helps to affirm their Christian identity. In other Catholic schools, they do not have as clear an identity. Instead, alliances are formed among those persons who work toward an integrative education of the young people and toward the humanization of the school. Together, they pursue a single objective. For Catholics, this objective is specifically Christian. Others assent to this or at least do not object.

The Catholic school on occasion brings together students and adults of the Christian faith who so desire. These groups provide opportunities to renew motivation, commitment and solidarity. Christian communities can be invaluable resources for these groups.

4.3 Respect for freedom of conscience and of religion

Respect for freedom of conscience and of religion is a fundamental value of the Catholic faith and therefore of the Catholic school. The educational and humanizing school described here pursues a mission that is, in a manner of speaking, universal. It constructs its educational project by delving deeply into that which each person in the school is seeking and that to which he or she profoundly aspires. This school should be a livable place, educational for all, regardless of their situation or personal faith. The Catholic school is then open to universality, according to the very etymology of the word "Catholic". To qualify one's school as Catholic is to commit oneself to a deeper discovery of this profound meaning of the word and to put it into practice. In many situations, there are more and more opportunities to meet this challenge of openness.

Respect for freedom of conscience and of religion is a fundamental value of the educational project of the Catholic school. Each person in the school must "be immune from coercion...(so) that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs...whether alone or in association with others".[11] This right to religious freedom is a civil right. In the new Québec sociocultural context, that of Montréal in particular, where new Quebecers will soon constitute half of the school population, this question is of the utmost importance. It is particularly challenging to Catholic religious instruction and pastoral animation, which must be dispensed only to students who wish to receive it.

The new Education Act in fact guarantees the right of any student to Catholic religious instruction and to pastoral animation in the school he attends; even a non-denominational school may dispense religious instruction and pastoral animation. This allows the parents to choose a non-denominational school, a possibility that was, until now, virtually non-existent. Through another legal provision that allows the establishment of various educational projects, schools of other denominations, for example Moslem, Greek Orthodox or Jewish, may be set up. Lastly, there is a possibility of moral and religious instruction other than Catholic — even in a Catholic school — for a given religious group that wishes to have it.

These new options may strengthen respect for freedom of conscience and of religion. They enhance the student's existing right to moral instruction, the teacher's right to an exemption from teaching religion and the possibility that a school may request that its confessional status be revoked.

None of these options affects the structure of the school. The Catholic public school will continue to welcome students and staff of various faiths. It expects these people to respect its Catholic character and it will avoid any form of indoctrination or moral persuasion. Many Catholic schools have openly accepted plurality on a daily basis with no difficulty. By the very reason of its Catholic character, the educational project of the Catholic school is challenged to maintain an effective and concrete openness to all.

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11. Vatican II, ***Declaration on Religious Freedom***, No. 2.

4.4 Evaluation of the school's functioning as a confessional institution

There is, in some instances, a disparity between the school's status and its functioning as a confessional institution. This is why section 7 of the Catholic Committee Regulation states that evaluation of its functioning as a Catholic school will provide an opportunity for the partners in the school to take stock of the situation in order to make improvements or perhaps to ascertain that the schoool's confessional status no longer serves a useful purpose.

This section serves as an incentive. ***Its objective is to ensure that there is a better correlation between the confessional status of the school and its functioning as a confessional institution***, and that the school is not Catholic in name only. Evaluation of the school's functioning as a confessional institution may ***result in a decision, arrived at democratically, to request that its confessional status be revoked.***

* * *

The real possibilities of integrating the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion into a school's educational project have been discussed in this chapter, with particular emphasis on doing so in the best interest of the student. It has been shown that an educational project is developed, and commitment to the Christian vision of the human being and the world is integrated into the project through a quest for today's most favourable, concrete conditions for the education of students. There are, however, three prerequisites: a common decision which favors that the school must take responsibility for itself, a wholesome confidence in the school staff, and the conviction that the Christian vision makes a relevant contribution to the education of Quebecers.

CONCLUSION

A school recognized as Catholic integrates into its educational project the beliefs and values of the Catholic religion while maintaining respect for freedom of conscience and of religion. The challenge to the Catholic school of its educational project is real and concrete, as illustrated in the preceding chapters, which also suggest the paths through which the challenge may be met.

The Catholic Committee has discussed in this document the Catholic school in a secular world where many religious movements coexist. According to the Committee, the development of the educational project of a Catholic school today implies, first of all, that the models drawn up in an age of Christianity be surpassed. This educational project comes about in many novel ways, often innovative, through the creative participation of Christians in defining the orientation and objectives of their school.

This approach challenges the status quo in most educational milieux, according to which the Catholic school tends to be defined by what distinguishes it, in absolute terms, from other schools. The Catholic Committee believes that the project of the Catholic school must be developed, above all, from an educational perspective for today's students and today's society. It is defined according to the school's exclusive characteristics, but with emphasis on its Christian character.

Problems remain, notably that of restructuring within the school. But there is a way to overcome them by rediscovering the true meaning of the school and shared reasons for working in it together. Looking again at the level of educational convictions, and, at the same time, for Catholics, at the level of referring to the beliefs and the values of the Christian faith are already good starting points. This would give the opportunity, in the long term, of translating conviction into action.

If the Committee has helped to identify and dispel a number of ambiguities, and to provide some perspective, then it has paved the way for feasible action, which was the goal of this discussion of the educational project of the Catholic school.

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